



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: January – March 2005

**YEMEN: POLITICAL PARTY CAPACITY BUILDING
AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION (04864)
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. DGC-A-00-01-00004-00**

**Project dates: May 10, 2004 to July 10, 2005
Total budget: \$695,000.00 Expenses to date: \$387,415.20**

I. SUMMARY

During the past decade, Yemen has led the Arab world in movement toward meaningful democratic reform and in prospects for a more representative and inclusive political system. Yemen holds claim as the first state on the Arabian Peninsula to enfranchise women, boasts a multi-party electoral system, and has implemented a decentralization process that included the creation of elected local councils in 2001. Its political leaders, through both actions and rhetoric, have created an expectation among the Yemeni people that they should have a say in how their country is governed. Despite these accomplishments and a stated commitment to modernization and reform, events in recent years have destabilized fragile party relations and illustrated the continuing challenges to Yemen's democratic aspirations.

The 2003 elections highlighted challenges that remain in carrying out the commitments made by Yemen's political leaders to implement democratic reforms and ensure a representative, equitable political system. Yemen's female population is becoming discontented with the lack of concrete action stemming from leader's rhetoric to support women's participation. The role of women remains a central issue that Yemen's political leaders will have to address to maintain the legitimacy of any democratic progress while the political implications of the April polls illustrate the need for consistent support of reform-minded individuals, both within the government and amongst political party and civic leaders.

In this context, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) launched the Political Party Capacity Building and Women's Participation program in May 2004 to address issues facing political parties and women's political role. This program seeks to meet the following objectives:

- To increase parties' abilities to engage in constructive dialogue with each other, with the government and with the country's citizens;
- To assist the country's leaders to strengthen the representative nature of Yemen's political party system and to improve the internal party structures to make them more democratic and inclusive; and

- To increase the ability of women to participate in the country's decision-making processes within their communities, political parties, government and as elected officials.

NDI's party and women's program activities were slowed this quarter by the establishment of the new NDI office, building internal capacity of new staff and the delayed arrival of new Program Manager, Sasha Pajevic, from the NDI-Montenegro office. However, NDI worked to meet its program objectives through the following activities, meetings and consultations that assisted:

- Political party leaders to:
 - Understand problem solving and other conflict resolution techniques; and
 - Improve inter party relations.
- Women leaders from the GPC, Islah and the YSP to:
 - Think strategically about increasing women's nomination in the 2006 elections;
 - Develop conflict resolution skills; and
 - Participate more fully in party trainings and meetings.

Additionally, NDI was able to work with the newly hired Chief Technical Advisor to the UNDP Electoral Support Project to initiate steps toward establishing the women's department in the Supreme Committee for Elections and Referenda (SCER).

NDI's program is focused on strengthening the capacity of political parties and women so that they may more positively impact the decision-making process. The Institute's activities in the last quarter aimed at preparing the ground for the 2006 elections by improving the political framework and institutional environment in which parties will compete and women will campaign.

II. BACKGROUND

Political Parties

Of the countries in the Middle East that have committed to establishing more democratic and representative forms of government, Yemen has exhibited a relatively consistent commitment to maintaining a multi-party system. Three major parties currently play a leading role in the country's political arena: the General People's Congress (GPC), the party of President Saleh and the ruling party of Yemen; the Yemen Congregation for Reform (*Al-Islah*), an Islamist party that comprises a sizable reform and modernist element; and the left liberal Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) which ruled former South Yemen until unification in 1990. There are a number of smaller parties which participate in the parliament and electoral politics including the Nasserite Unionist Party and the National Baath Party, although their influence on the national level remains minimal.

Despite this significant experience with a multi-party system, the ruling GPC is seen as synonymous with the government and the President's party continues to dominate the political and economic life of the country. The development of the opposition coalition, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), which includes *Islah* and the YSP, was a step forward in the emergence of a viable opposition. GPC attempts to exploit the competitive elections environment through negative and provocative campaigns, however, led to weakened relations between the parties.

The recent history of antagonism, aggressive politicking and confrontational interactions between the ruling and opposition parties following the elections resulted in a need for discussions on conflict resolution and effective methods of communication between political parties. Following a post-election assessment and with assistance from NDI, opposition parties and civil society activists, whose rhetoric and stances toward the SCER were initially provocative, began to work more effectively to present their concepts to the SCER. The SCER has agreed to include in its recommendations for election law change approximately seventy-five percent of the ideas presented by the committee of women candidates organized by NDI.

Individual consultations with the leadership of the GPC, as well as *Islah* and the YSP, indicate that these leaders recognize the importance of and their stake in building confidence in a legitimate political party structure. With local elections scheduled for 2006, the current political environment presents an opportunity to establish a healthy and productive way of resolving conflict before another round of contentious electoral contests are under way.

Additionally, Yemen's parties continue to rely more upon connections with tribal leaders and social figures than on reaching out to constituents at the grassroots level. None of the parties articulate consistent policy positions on national issues. The GPC's failure to articulate policy direction is not surprising given the party's numerical dominance in parliament. However, the opposition has reached a sufficient level of cohesiveness and sophistication to effectively form an opposition caucus and begin to debate public policies.

World Bank and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) analyses indicate that Yemen is threatened with imminent economic collapse unless concrete steps are taken to address problems of corruption, water usage and population growth. NDI encouragement of inter-party dialogue will be a key factor in assisting the parties to move to address national issues in a more constructive manner. This aspect of NDI's work with the political parties intersects with NDI's parliamentary program. Ruling party and opposition positions are too often adopted for reasons of political expediency with little regard to national interests. By engaging in dialogue and cooperation on common goals and issues, the parties will be better positioned to promote a more democratic and representative political system.

Women in Political Parties and Elections

Women's political participation in Yemen is significantly higher than in other countries in the region. Yemen was the first country on the Arabian Peninsula to enfranchise women, and Yemeni law allows women to run for all national and local offices. The country has, in fact, elected women in every election since unification in 1990: in 1993, 21 women ran for parliament and two won seats; in 1997, 17 women ran for parliamentary office and again two women won

seats; in the country's first local council elections in 2001, 147 women ran, and 38 won. The registration of women voters also increased significantly during the last elections, from 1.8 million in 1997 to 3.4 million voters in 2003.

Despite these figures, women's participation in Yemen's political life has been diminishing overall, rather than growing. Each parliamentary election has seen a decrease in the number of women running for office – only 11 women ran in 2003, and only one won a seat in parliament, lowering the number of women legislators from two to one. Although there is cultural resistance to women breaking into the political realm, particularly in tribal areas, recent experiences of women candidates suggests that the problems in urban areas are more political and institutional than cultural. Yemen's political parties - who failed to nominate women candidates in any significant number or appoint women to the electoral commissions for the April 2003 polls - did little to encourage women candidates or to protect the rights of those who were running.

Women's organizations put pressure on the parties and government to set aside seats for women in certain districts, but this initiative failed when the GPC refused to negotiate with the opposition on a formal agreement. Institutional barriers to women's participation also exist in the implementation of seemingly neutral regulations. Most women are forced to run as independent candidates because of the lack of party support. In the April 2003 elections, a requirement that independent candidates submit a petition with 300 signatures collected from a majority of centers in the constituency served as a barrier for women since their female supporters had less ability to move around the area.

In a notable move, the Commission agreed to NDI's proposal to establish a women's department within the SCER that would report directly to the Chairman of the SCER. Although the head of the department will not be a full commissioner, she will have a full voice in commission decisions. In light of the many problems faced by women candidates during previous elections, this development signals a concrete commitment from the government to address women's participation in the administration of future elections.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Conflict Resolution Training

NDI hosted conflict resolution workshops for leaders from the political, media, elections and women departments of the political parties represented in parliament. The Lebanon Conflict Resolution Network (LCRN) conducted the series of trainings on problem solving, group facilitation and negotiation. The party leaders were strongly supportive of the components. The women's committees made up almost half of the participants in the first of the series of LCRN trainings.

The participants were introduced to conflict resolution theory and trained on techniques of analyzing problems and basic concepts in solving interpersonal problems. The trainer then introduced the participants to

“This workshop and its timing show how much NDI understands Yemen and its political environment. I congratulate NDI for the perfect timing and topic.”
Abdul-Ghani Abdul-Qhadeer, Head of Political Department, Yemeni Socialist Party

different types of conflicts, emphasizing the importance of dialogue to address conflicts and distinguishing between positions and interests. The trainer provided comparative examples on negotiations, individual conflict, the structure of conflict and its escalation, body language and how to identify interests and how to defend them. The participants committed to applying what they had learned in the workshop in their daily dealings and within their families, workplace and with colleagues. They also expressed strong interest in learning more about other concepts and techniques related to conflict resolution. In addition to their appreciation of the training topic, they were particularly positive about the value of working together across party lines

The goal of the follow-up workshop, held a month later, was to review what the participants had learned at the first workshop and to analyze and learn from their experiences with conflict resolution. The trainer first reviewed the previous workshop and then participants discussed how and where they used what they had learned.

A member of the Parliament Health Committee discussed his role as a mediator in the doctors-strike. The committee talked to the government about the doctor salaries and they reached an agreement. He talked about using the strategy of putting himself in the other person's shoes. He knew there were multiple interests and thus multiple solutions. Yet, he found that people's interests were overlapping, which made it possible to reach consensus.

A director in the Women's Development Department in the Ministry of Local Administration (MoLA) talked about feeling discriminated against by her superiors at MoLA. She thinks that proposals she submits are blocked because she is a woman. She said that she has tried various techniques including negotiation. Other participants at the workshop offered their perspectives and advice. In the end, the trainer suggested she ask for an official meeting to confront her concerns directly. The trainer proposed that she think of possible reactions and prepare her reaction to each one.

Participants commented that they would like to see many more such trainings and were particularly interested in a skills training in Training of Trainers.

Developing the Women's Department of the SCER

NDI Yemen began to work with the newly arrived Chief Technical Advisor for the Stage Two Electoral Support Project of the UNDP to establish the women's department in the SCER. Now that the Support Project is almost fully staffed, NDI will assist the SCER to hire the new head of the Women's Department. NDI has also begun to organize training for the department head and staff.

Building Women's Participation

NDI's party and women's program activities were slowed by the need to focus on setting up the new office and building internal capacity plus the need to fill the position vacated by the previous Party and Women's Program Manager. However, consultative meetings continued during this period and the first of a series of problem solving/conflict resolution trainings were held. That process was completed by mid-February and NDI Yemen is now fully staffed and a

women's room has been set up in the new Democracy Development Center. NDI was fortunate to hire a woman resource center manager who can more easily train and assist women.

NDI met on a number of occasions with Human Rights Minister Amat Aleem Alsoswa and Presidential Advisor, Dr. Abdul Karim Iryani, to discuss strategies for enhancing the opportunity for women to gain the nomination of their parties in the 2006 elections. There was consensus that NDI could best contribute by strengthening the women's committees of the parties: helping them to gain leverage in the decision-making process. NDI's insistence on the inclusion of members of the women's committees in meetings with NDI has been appreciated by the committees and observed by the male leadership. In addition, the male leadership have commented very favourably on the quality of women's participation in trainings.

"NDI once again provided us a great opportunity to work with brothers from other political parties and also to meet colleagues from the different departments in my own party with whom I rarely work." *Younis Haza'a, Head of Political Dept. Ruling Party (GPC)*

Following those meetings, the Permanent Committee of the GPC approved a proposal to allocate 10 percent of the parliament's seats and 15 percent to 20 percent of the Local Councils seats for women. The GPC leaders have expressed that they continue to benefit from NDI's support with women's participation and political party dynamics. The institute is currently assisting the party to organize a forum that shall be attended by all political parties to discuss the quota system.

Building Relations within and between Political Parties

NDI had separate meetings with *Islah*, the GPC, the YSP and Nasserite parties. These meetings introduced the new program manager to the leadership of the major parties in Yemen. The parties discussed the situation of the women in Yemen and the support the parties are giving to the women to encourage them more to participate in the political life of the country. They also made recommendations to NDI regarding their needs and how NDI could assist them.

NDI also met separately with each of the women's committees from the GPC, *Islah*, the Nasserites and the YSP. They each expressed an interest in receiving more training on recruitment, fundraising, communication, message development, candidate and awareness-raising campaigns. Generally the committees had similar complaints including lack of education for girls, particularly in tribal areas, and insufficient finances. While the three party committees claimed that the central leadership had maintained the commitment to not holding party meetings as qat chews, they all asked for NDI assistance with the problem at the branch level.

IV. RESULTS

Result 1: Yemen's political parties gain experience in techniques to achieve constructive dialogue on issues of national import

Indicators

- Political Party leaders worked together in small groups at the LCRN workshop to understand conflict resolution theory;
- Political Party leaders applied what they had learned in the workshop to their activities within the workplace, family and parties;
- Political party leaders continued to discuss recommendations for electoral reform and improved communication with the SCER; and
- Political parties developed improved inter-party relations among the leadership

Result 2: The Republic of Yemen Government, in particular the SCER and Ministry of Local Administration, take steps to implement electoral reforms and remove impediments facing women running for local and national office

Indicators

- The SCER continues to request assistance from the Institute to formalize the responsibilities of its newly created women's department; and
- NDI continues to secure technical and direct support mechanisms from international Embassies and donor organizations for the work of the SCER women's department.

Result 3: Women develop strategies to promote and improve their capacity to participate in the processes of their political parties, government, and as elected officials.

Indicators

- Party women leaders identified areas in which they would like to receive more training;
- Male party leaders gained awareness that women can contribute to activities and on issues that are not specific to women;
- Women party leaders gained confidence in dealing as equals with male leaders; and
- The GPC approved talks with all political parties on reserving 10 percent of Parliament and 15 – 20 per cent of local council seats for women.
- GPC also set internal party quotas. "Ten percent of all seats on the Permanent Committee are to be given to women. At the governorate level approximately 30 per cent of leadership seats are to go to women. At the district level, 33 per cent to women and at the sub-district level 40% are to go to women."

V. EVALUATION

The active participation of women at the LCRN training was a particularly successful aspect of the workshop. Unlike most workshops that include women with men, the subject of this workshop was a topic of interest to the party, not simply to women. Although the women were a little reticent the first day, by the second day they were full participants.

As more than one participant noted, prior to this workshop, the participants had not had the opportunity to work together. They were always on the other side of the table fighting for their positions. The workshop helped them to recognize the benefits of working together to find a common ground and the difference between interests which may not be negotiable and positions which are.

Each of the party meetings facilitated the introduction of the new resident political party and women's participation expert. They also enabled parties to outline their needs. The Nasserite was very specific about its priorities and how NDI could assist with them. The YSP discussed the difficult situation in the country for the Party and for women in particular and pointed out some of the difficulties they face in operating.

The women's committees also were very clear about their needs to improve internal party dynamics and to advance inter-party unity. One member of the GPC was enthusiastic and focused on action in lieu of conferences and formal dinners. She stressed the need for the GPC women's committee to come up with a strategy to achieve their goals first, and then join other parties. They all expressed their appreciation to NDI for its encouragement and commitment to working with all of the parties. Each continues to demonstrate strategic thinking in how the party structures function and how the party interacts with government leaders.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

During the next quarter, NDI will continue its work with the government, political parties and citizens to address reform-related issues and discuss potential future steps. To support the parties' efforts, NDI will monitor the implementation of their proposed projects and continue ongoing meetings and consultations with party leaders. The series of Conflict Resolution, Group Facilitation and Negotiation trainings for political parties will continue.

The Institute will also work in conjunction with SCER to provide training for the new head of the women's department. NDI will also push to have the department established by decree of the commissioners to ensure it continues to function till 2009.

NDI will continue to work with the women leaders from each of the three parties to monitor their progress and assist them in the development of additional programs to enhance communication between the branches and the center, in particular in pushing for the implementation of the principles of the joint declaration.

NDI will organize a strategic planning workshop for female and male leaders from the branches. The GPC plans to organize multi party seminar(s) with all parties to discuss how to apply a quota system. The Resident Women's Participation Expert will monitor the implementation of this project.

NDI will also seek to coordinate communication and strategizing among the various international organizations seeking to increase women's participation.

